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TAGS: OIIP PGOV KPAO SG

SUBJECT: SENEGALESE MEDIA BLACKS OUT

Ref: Dakar 765

¶11. SUMMARY: On 21 July, private Senegalese media sources observed a news blackout as a show of solidarity in support of two Senegalese sports journalists beaten by police on 22 June (retel). Journalists are demanding the Government of Senegal (GOS) take punitive action against the officers involved. Relations between the GOS and the press remain tense after a series of incidents involving violence against journalists or their arbitrary detention by government authorities over the last few years. END SUMMARY.

¶12. On 21 July, private Senegalese media sources observed a 24-hour news blackout as a show of solidarity in support of two Senegalese sports journalists beaten by police on 22 June. The blackout included daily newspapers, radio programming, and several news web sites. State-run media, including the only news television station, RTS, continued to operate normally.

¶13. Senegalese journalists are demanding the GOS take punitive action against police officers involved in the 22 June beating of sports journalists Boubacar Campbell Dieng (Radio Futurs Medias), and Karamokho Thioune (West Africa Democracy Radio). The incident occurred at Leopold Sedar Senghor stadium in Dakar as the journalists were attempting to interview Senegalese national team soccer players after a match against Liberia. According to the Union of Information and Communications Professionals of Senegal (Synpics), the assault occurred in an area where the media is allowed to interview players and the teams' staff. After police subdued the journalists, they were handcuffed and detained for 30 minutes before being taken to the hospital for medical treatment, where Dieng was admitted for approximately 20 days.

¶14. On 9 July, after the Committee for the Defense and Protection of Journalists (an ad-hoc organization recently formed to defend journalists from government harassment) lodged a formal complaint, Senegalese Minister of Interior Cheikh Tidiane Sy indicated the GOS would investigate the incident. On 10 July (the following day) the GOS issued a statement noting that two police officers involved in the beatings were administratively punished and transferred to another unit.

¶15. The GOS claimed, however, that police involved in the altercation were defending themselves after being assaulted by journalists. This statement was reinforced by the Minister of Armed Forces Bécaye Diop who noted police are regularly attacked by civilians while on duty. (COMMENT: The claim that Senegalese police are regularly assaulted by civilians is dubious; post has no evidence to support this assertion. END COMMENT.)

¶16. Journalists remain unconvinced the GOS is serious about restraining police and have called for an independent investigation. The Committee has unveiled an action plan that includes street demonstrations and other civil disobedience; the observance of a "day without press" was part of the action plan. Relations between the GOS and the press remain tense after increasingly frequent incidents involving violence against journalists or their arbitrary detention by government authorities over the last few years.

SMITH